

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, ranking members Miner and France, and distinguished members the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Richard P. Dibala and I am from Mansfield Center. I am a retired family physician and a supporter of CAGV.

As we transition from the COVID pandemic to an endemic state, the epidemic of gun violence continues to plague America, and particularly its urban centers. In the wake of the many stresses created by COVID, fatal gun violence has proliferated across our country. Frustrated, angry people living in poverty and devoid of hope and options are too frequently victims of the flood of lethal firearms that has inundated the streets of our major cities. This has been dramatically and poignantly demonstrated in Hartford, as well as in other cities in our state and around the nation. Murders in our capital city reached a 25 year high last year, and 2022 appears to be headed in the same deadly direction, with two more gun deaths only two nights ago.

Governor Lamont has proposed a wide slate of initiatives aimed at a number of cracks in our system of crime prevention, at a price tag of 64 million dollars. While important and well intended, these measures do not adequately approach the root causes of gun violence in our cities—the culture that produces desperation, hopelessness, and a paucity of alternatives to drug use, gang affiliation, gun ownership, and a lowered threshold to engage in violent behavior, resulting in enormous human, economic, and societal costs. These conditions cry out for the need for community based efforts to steer this at risk population in a safer, more productive direction. The 3.6 million dollar proposal for community based programs under the Department of Public Health Office of Injury Prevention is a good start, but is inadequate in view of the scope of the problem. The need demands an Office of Community Based Gun Violence Prevention to establish a sustainable effort at healing this societal scourge by training, employing, and utilizing a community presence in touch with the sources of the violence, and providing the resources to offer alternatives to this destructive behavior. A structure to renew sources of funding and support is also critical to sustain this effort across generations.

There is strong evidence supporting this approach. It has been successful in reducing gun violence in multiple cities (Boston, Oakland, and New Haven, with its Project Longevity, to name a few), and monies are being allocated in states across the country (Maryland, California, Illinois, Massachusetts) toward community based gun violence prevention programs. With Connecticut's current financial cushion, and a deep seated cultural problem in need of more than a bandaid, I strongly urge the Committee to generously support this initiative endorsed by CAGV.

Thank you for your attention and your careful consideration of this important proposal.